

NYE TELLS A STORY

It is About a Poor Poet in the Time of Gutenberg.

SOMETHING QUITE PATHETIC

How He Succeeded in Getting His Little Volume Published and the Volume Was Called "The Poet Who Came Too Late."

Copyright, 1902, by Edgar W. Nye.
"I would like very much," said the poet, who had evidently earned a hearty laugh of content that morning, "to see Mr. Gutenberg if he is in." He then went to the printer's shop, and found the master and ran his trembling fingers around in the bottom of his trousers pocket for a stray shilling of tobacco.



THE POET MADE AN OMBREANCE.

"He is away," said the clerk bank youth who was looking over the forms for what he called by the printer's typographical name of type case, and which the reader may possibly be able to see if he will ask the foreman of this office. "He has gone down cellar to see if he can't hurry up the decomposition of his cheese for Christmas. He may yet again of this place be upon 2 o'clock."

The poet waited, listening to the sounds of the rain and the loud, rocky plunk of the wooden shoe of the common peasant outside; also he could hear below the loud, coarse argument between Gutenberg and the cheese.

"I am a weary," said the poet. "Here is a common, low man who could not write a stanza of a song, yet he is able to own cheese and keep it till it gets a head on it. He, forsooth, could not even write 'The Clerk Leg' or the 'Lark,' and yet he is able to run his cheese till it can jump a 9-foot fence."

"Why is it?"
"Why can a German tinker who knows a little magic, such as how to make an ombre in a plug, but with an old stove or turn the jack from the bottom of the back and yet have as many victrolas the next morning as ever, go on making money, while I, who bring tears to favored eyes and sob from the breast of the young and fair, have not dipped my parching bank in a beaker or bathed my waning little mustache in a stein of cool beer since week before last?"

After a time the heavy tread of the publisher was heard coming up the stairs, and in the gray light of the office the poet saw the strong features of Johann Gutenberg of the great publishing house of Gutenberg, Faust & Schoeffer, printers of royal equitation work, bank work, county work, show printing, such as handbills, programmes, dogtags, hangers and memorial posters at low prices.

"Gute mornin'," said the great inventor of movable types and trade rates on book publishing as he gave that peculiar but enticing melody to his voice which the American without tonalities can never hope to acquire. "We gate?"

The poet made an ombreance so sudden and so earnest that his surprised and astonished publisher rattled against his ribs like lightning.

"Gute mornin', mytheer," he said. "Ombreance?"

"He then sat down again and ate a little of the poet to give him strength. Then he said his business."

"I want," he said in a low but respectful voice, "to print a small book of my poems."

"Ah," said Mr. Gutenberg, "you'll have to see Schoeffer about that. I attend to the realm of sacred words. I am now writing and getting ready an expanded edition of the Bible that will be as good a Christmas book as you ever saw. I am one of the best expurgators in the business, but poetry doesn't catch on. I could take a good living just by expurgating alone."

"Schoeffer is the man for you to see. He tends to the Verstricker, the Jackstraw and the poetaster."

With that he hit into a big red apple and went up stairs in order to indicate that the interview was at an end.

The poet asked for Mr. Schoeffer, but he was out of town trying to get the tax hat and county printing for Strasburg.

It was several days before the poet went back again to the office and wiped his feet on the large hole at the threshold worked in gray cloth sack and used at that time for doormats.

The poet had been ill. He had been invited to drink something and had thoughtlessly done so on an empty stomach. "I have not eaten anything," he said, as if to himself, "but I cannot have this opportunity in order to go about the whole city seeking to comply with an old publisher's whim."

Therefore the head was hurting him more, and the moaning fragment of the dog that had bitten him was out of the question.

Schoeffer was an odd looking man who had risen from farm life to the normal school and thence to the publishing business. He corrected people who made little grammatical errors and charged it up to their copyright account. He would look the printers around till they got to looking about cement and its penetration. Then he would beat with them, and those who lost had it taken out of their wages.

"I have very little to do here," said Mr. Schoeffer, "except in the evening, I am now in the firm to correct proofs and look out for the press than anything else. Mr. Gutenberg of course corrects the printing of standard works on which there is no copyright. He is just leaving the 'Song of Solomon' for Christmas."

"There will be an expanded edition

for the book and that is all. But I have not been expurgated for books and men."

"But do you not handle other books, for other authors who can still sue for price?"

"Very rarely. How many copies do you want to print?"

"Why, I could hardly tell of course, all depending on how the public nibbled at it. Of course I wanted one copy for my mother. She would like it and appreciate it, because she has always laughed and wept and loved me for these poor things that I have done. Other people have read some of them, too, and then read them over again and written to me about them as they would if they liked them, and surely they do not do it to win my good opinion, for that is not worth anything to anybody."

"I do not write as a regular thing, Mr. Schoeffer, but I write because my heart says so. There are no limitations and no systems in my poetry, for my imagination has been really all the time in the more orders than we get, so this isn't a reprint of other stuff, but as far as just held previous between me and my soul."

"I would want to send a copy to the county school superintendent. He knows me and knows how I think. He knows what I have to stand and how I hate to come and ask people to buy my poems, these little books of my soul, at so much per line."

"Well, would a dozen copies be enough?"

"Oh, yes, probably, but there might be some other way. I would want them, and I'd like to say that there were no more if asked for others."

"Well, would you want to publish on a royalty of 10 per cent, you of course to give us good bankable security that the original cost should be paid, and then afterward you get 10 per cent of all good cash sales, provided that the 10 per cent should be on wholesale prices, we to retain the copyright and right to reneval?"

"Well, of course I want to print the book so as to have something to show afterward, and way on in the hereafter, too, that I had these thoughts; that I was first to remind other men that they, too, had their thoughts fresh and true, but unexpressed, and that I, poor and unworldly and asking with the sensitive soul that was divinely bestowed, perhaps, but borne in my sorrowing breast almost unbelieved through life from the poets of those who live to laugh and breathe and wink and sneeze and die—that I had walked a drowsy drowsy lark in the heart of another and caused that little song of mine to go on and on for others to tune their part. But I don't know much about this per cent or copyright or renewal or all that."

"Well," says Mr. Gutenberg, strolling in and working as he came, cutting the tail from a jacket to make an I of it, as publishers do sometimes, "my drawhere is about worn out. I used a new three cornered file and ought to have a new flat file, and we are plumb out of charcoal and lead. We'll have to make it that low, and if Schoeffer hadn't said it I would not agree to it. But if you put in the agreement that you are to have access to your own books only and we to ours I will agree to Schoeffer's terms."

"They pushed him around to this desk, and that notary, and this burgomaster, and that brewer till the trade was made, and the poet had all the risk to run, and his song was sung, and he knew it the notes were in another's mouth."

Gutenberg & Co. got some new presses and kept their books so close that nobody else ever saw them, but the poet's books kept selling.

When he wanted an extra copy to give his mother, they gave him one that had 16 pages put in wrong side up, and the dying mother lost those pages because she was too feeble to stand on her head and read them.

Then they kicked at him in dull times because there were too many tears in his verse, and they would wink at each other over their fat bellies and say that his poetry was too damp.

"Too late! He is dead!"

And when he was broken in spirit and the autumn of his sorrowful life flickered in his sad, worn eyes they cheered him by putting out a new edition for Christmas, and he found that they had put his portrait in it with no gravestone.

When he was dying up stairs among the rafters and far away and could no more then get a note or two of the bass drum in the celestial band, a beautiful young lady in a new dress drove up to the hall door. Jewels were in her hair and flashed from her pink and white hands and wrists.

She ran hastily up the old clattering stairs, her silk gown and freshly starched skirts glittering up the old rail with a sound like the summer wind in the poplars.

She softly opened the door and stood looking at the poet, but he did not see her. The gentle wind stirred his gray, soft hair as a grandchild might have done.

He had gone far beyond the laws of copyright and cent per cent.

The beautiful girl grew sad. A cloud swept over the broad, soft brow.

"Too late! Too late!" she said as she looked out at the west with a crystal fear rising and hanging like a diamond from one of her eyelashes as Miss Gutenberg touched her heart with her gloved hand.

"Too late! My God, he is dead, and I did not get his autograph!"

Improvements have been made in printing and typesetting. One man does what 50 did in Gutenberg's time, and huge buildings with thundering presses and clattering typesetting machines rise to the sky. A good looking book of 800 pages, well bound, may be made for 5 cents and given on the dry goods counters with each inch of the dry goods counter.

Sunday train to Ottawa Beach leaves union station every Sunday at 9:30 a. m. Leaves the beach at 6:30 p. m. Round trip rate, 75 cents.

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